

STORY PAPER  
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 25 No 299

NOVEMBER 1971

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## COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

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NOVEMBER 1971

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A  
WORD  
FROM THE  
SKIPPER

NOVEMBER MIST

Between the wars, at this time of year, it was a joy to see the bookshops with stacks of the Annuals which we had grown to know and love. Now, in another November, forty or fifty years on, I see the bookshops once again packed with Annuals. In fact, I do not think that ever before there has been such a variety of Annuals. From the outside, these new Annuals, with their great variety of titles, look pale shadows of the Annuals we once knew.

The Holiday Annual, which seems to have been the most loved of all the old ones, deteriorated after the twenties became the thirties. As I stand in the November mist and gaze through the shop windows, I wonder whether any Annual of modern times has ever improved on the old Holiday Annual in its heyday.

Recently there has been an outcry over the dangers of "clackers" or "kernockers" or whatever they call them - you probably know what I mean. Also, in recent years, there has been a big outcry to ban fireworks for youngsters. Charles Hamilton wrote dozens of delightful stories featuring fireworks and bonfires. They might be frowned upon today.

I sometimes wonder whether life for young people may not be spoiled by the current trend of seeing danger in everything. Oddly enough, while seeing so much danger everywhere, many of these do-gooders have an obsession for sex education for the very young - some of it most weird and wonderful. They see no danger in that.

When we were kids, we did not see films on sex education. We had our fireworks on November the Fifth. We had our crazes - conkers, the yo-yo, and, in earlier times, diavolo. Iron hoops, which we bowled along the pavements, had their own perils, but I loved mine. Nobody said "ban hoops." I used to walk along the parapet of a railway bridge. My parents, rightly, would have had fits had they known, and would have read the riot act to me. One of my schoolboys climbed a tree, fell out of it, and was badly hurt. But nobody said "cut down all the trees." Thousands of boys climb trees without being hurt. Does anyone remember the tin propellers which we used to force up a spiral stalk of tin, to send the propeller flying off into the air? They could have caused injury, but I have never heard that anyone wanted them banned.

It is truly terrible when a child gets burned as a result of fireworks. But thousands play with fireworks without coming to grief.

I, personally, would not give a young child a bicycle to ride about on, nor, in fact, would I give a 16-year old a motor-bike. But are we wise, as a nation, in seeing danger in everything for the young - except in plenty of sex talk?

Large numbers of readers have written to me very kindly to enquire after "Mr. Softee." I am happy to say that he is doing well.

In fact, he is showing so many of "Mr. Chips'" little ways that I fancy Chipsey must be purring in his ear now and then. In passing, we have ordered the new "Mr. Chips" rose, which will be planted in our garden shortly.

### SILVER JUBILEES

This month, Collectors' Digest is 25 years old. Next month we reach our 300th issue - and Christmas. To mark our Silver Jubilee, our 300th issue, and Christmas we shall publish next month our "Christmas Double Number." We have had one or two double numbers in the past, but this will be the first Christmas Double Number in our history. Of necessity, there may not be a great deal about Christmas in it, but it will mark something which surely must be, for all of us, a great occasion.

This issue will cost 25p - that is, double our normal price. For our subscribers, our plan will be the one we adopted in connection with previous double numbers. One month will be subtracted from the subscription completion date. If any regular subscriber does not wish to receive this Christmas "special," he should please let us know in good time, and in that case one month will be added to his subscription completion date.

One other point I should perhaps mention at this time. For nearly two years we have held the price of C.D. at 12½p. These have been two years of inflation in all walks of life, not helped by our ill-conceived decimal currency system. The time will soon come, probably fairly early in the new year, when the price of C.D. must rise.

### SILVER JUBILEE ANNUAL

We are now in the closing stages of preparation for the Annual which will, all being well, be with you in mid-December. Our regular contributors have surpassed themselves in articles which, in my opinion, have never been beaten in the Annual. Just to pick out a few at random, Bob Blythe writes on E.S.B's connection with silent films, Roger Jenkins looks at Hamilton in the Holiday Annual, Tony Glynn waxes lyrical on some of the old comics, Christopher Lowder discovers the Sexton Blake classic "The Yellow Tiger," and Harold Truscott

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makes an appraisal of the work of a somewhat neglected writer, Michael Poole. And, of course, lots more, including Mr. Buddle who is back in "Mr. Buddle's Locum."

### THE EDITOR

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Boys' Friends from mid-1923 to April 1926, preferably long runs or in bound volumes. Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

XX

WANTED: Chums Annual 1934-35: Chatterbox Annuals 1914, 1918, 1920: Champion Annuals after 1926. Champion, Nelson Lee, Union Jack, Sexton Blake Lib.

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN STREET, CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA,  
AUSTRALIA 3192.

XX

WANTED: Mickey Mouse Annuals OR Specials 1936-1944. Also Walt Disney's THUMPER Annuals 1952-1954.

R. HAYDEN, 36 HIGHFIELD ROAD, LIVERPOOL 13.

XX

Highest prices paid for your Collection or surplus items.

Exchanges.

I can offer the largest selection and stock of Old Boys Books in the country. Send me your "wants lists," I may have items which you have "chased" for years!

THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS: 3 bound volumes of the Boys Cinema in exceptional condition, Nos. 1-29 (1919), 80-104, 157-182. £49.00 the three, or would separate. Also 140 loose v.g.c. 40p each 1928-1940.

Some more bound Magnets and Gems from 1935! Thousands of S.B.L.'s 3rd Series to end, many dups. Comics pre-1920. Rainbow, Puck, Chips, etc. B.F.L.'s School, Capt. Justice, Adventure. Regret no Hamiltonia, etc., in these. Post-war Thompsons.

NORMAN SHAW

84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, SE19 2HZ.

01 771 9857

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# DANNY'S DIARY

NOVEMBER 1921

I love November. There's a lovely fire burning in the grate, and we have toasted cheese for supper. And when you walk along the streets there is a lovely mist hanging about as it gets dark, and the leaves squish under your feet, and if you walk through the back roads there is a delicious smell of frying bloaters in the air, and in the town the man who has an ice-cream barrow in the summer now has his roast chestnut stall with a big hot fire in it. And you get a big bag of hot roasted chestnuts for a halfpenny.

I asked Mum if we could have some bloaters for supper one night, and she said "Certainly not!" I love November, though it's cold when you come out of the pictures.

Speaking of pictures, there have been some good ones this month. A big Cecil B. de Mille production was "Something to Think About" starring Gloria Swanson. An exciting new serial is entitled "Velvet Fingers." Chrissie White was in "Wild Heather;" William Farnum was in "Drag Harlan;" William Farnum was in "If I were King;" Ethel Clayton was in "Crooked Streets." I liked them all. There are some funny cartoons featuring "Pip, Squeak and Wilfred" running once a fortnight in one of our cinemas.

A pretty fair month for Rookwood in the Boys' Friend, even though the tales are so short. In "Putty's Proof," the Fourth Dramatic Society is to present Merchant of Venice, and Putty wants to play Portia. To prove he can do it, he turns up at Rookwood as Jimmy Silver's Cousin Clara.

In "Tubby's Tenner," Muffin found a cheque made out to bearer. He swanked with it for a time, and then, under pressure from the cads, he tried to cash it. But the police were waiting at the bank. In "Ragging the Rotters," Jimmy stirred up Smythe & Co. who were smoking and playing cards when they should have been playing football. And in "The Slackers' Football Challenge," Smythe & Co. challenged the junior eleven to meet them on the football field, but, unknown to Jimmy, Smythe is planning to have in his team a professional footballer named Leech.

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Princess Mary is engaged to Viscount Lascelles. So one of these days there will be a big Royal Wedding.

There has been some terrible flooding in London, the worst for many years, due to the exceptionally high tides. It is all due to the sun and the moon pulling together, so our geography master says. And Bank Rate has gone down to 5 per cent, as if I knew what that meant.

A moderate month in the Gem. "Grundy's Gunpowder Plot" was a story of the St. Jim's parliament. Usually they are a bore, but this one was novel and funny. Grundy & Co., armed with fireworks, hid under Pepper's barn where the parliament meets.

"An Old Man's Secret" was short - only 7 chapters. Tom Merry saves an old man from a train, and the old man gives Tom a box to mind, and the box is stolen, and so on. "Blake's Debt of Honour" introduced Blake's cousin, Wallace Sanderson. He sends Blake £250 and tells him to bank it, and that he can use the interest but not the capital. It has been pinched, Blake is arrested, and appears in court. Blake decides to go in for a football competition in a weekly paper, giving the results of football matches. He wins a prize, so is able to pay back the money his cousin stole. All very rum!

"All Figgins' Fault" was the first of a series, and very good. Figgins squirts Mr. Ratcliff, Mr. Ratcliff says he saw Tom Merry do it, Figgins confesses, Figgins is let off, the Head goes away for a holiday, and then Mr. Ratcliff punishes Figgy. It starts a New House barring-out.

A man named Landru has been condemned to death in France for murdering ten women.

Dad gave us a treat one evening. He took us to London and we saw Cochrane's revue "League of Notions" at the London Pavilion.

The poor old Magnet plods along, but the tales are pretty dreary. First story was "The Stolen Guy." Mr. Quelch offers a prize for the best guy, and Harry Wharton & Co. build theirs at Penfold's cottage, An inventor hides the plans of a new aeroplane engine in the guy which is stolen.

In "The Slacker's Spasm," Uncle Francis, a well-known physician, sends two little boxes to Sir Jimmy Vivian to look after. They contain powders. Wharton gives one of the powders - he thinks they are Seidlitz



# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

## TREASURE ISLAND

by O. W. Wadham

## IN THE UNION JACK

A picture of Mr. Arthur Bouchier as Long John Silver in the play "Treasure Island" at the Strand Theatre, London, has pride of place in No. 665 of the Boys' Friend Library. The half-page picture calls attention to the fact that the Union Jack was running the Robert Louis Stevenson story as a serial at the same time.

Seeing that Treasure Island had been made as a silent movie a short time before I cannot imagine that readers of the period would get wildly excited over the serial. There is no date on the Boys' Friend Library in which the advert appears but I should place it as being in the early 1920's at which time the U.J. was at its peak. Sexton Blake gets an excellent boost from that issue of the B.F.L. however. The back page is taken up with an advert for four numbers of the Sexton Blake Library. Dr. Huxton Rymer and Mary Trent are there and another character described as a fascinating Hindoo, is also featured in a story called "In Darkest Madras." The character billed as Gunga Dass I do not recall in any other Sexton Blake yarn. Does any reader of the grand old papers recall him?

### A REPLY by Josie Packman

I have checked up on my records and can give the dates of those stories mentioned by Mr. Wadham. The Boys' Friend Library is No. 665 of the first series and is dated May 1923. In front of me I have the Union Jack which advertises that particular number of the Boys' Friend and also the Sexton Blake Libraries. This copy also contains an episode of the serial Treasure Island, which began in U.J. No. 1012 dated 3 March, 1923, and finished in U.J. No. 1032 dated 21 July, 1923. This serial appeared to be quite popular according to letters printed in the Round Table in the U.J. We must remember that our readers at that time could not all visit the Theatre or Cinema to see these productions and welcomed a chance to read the story for them-

selves. As a matter of fact I looked up my copy of the "Silent Screen" and found that the silent film had been made in 1920 with Lon Chaney as Long John Silver. Two talking versions were made in 1934 and 1950.

As for Gunga Dass, he was a fine character of the early 1920's created by Mr. H. E. Hill under the pseudonym of Hylton Gregory. Dass was featured in a considerable number of tales in the Union Jack and the Sexton Blake Library some of the latter tales having been reprinted in the Sexton Blake Libraries of the late 1930's. From about 1938 onwards the character was revived by Anthony Parsons who wrote many good tales of Gunga Dass' evil doings in India.



NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL TREAT

by Anon.

Some time ago a friend of mine invited me to spend a Sunday afternoon together with a few other friends, watching old movies. The films consisted mostly of short 10 minute extracts from silent films such as "Ben Hur" starring Ramon Navarro and "Scaramouche" with the villain being played by - believe it or not - Lewis Stone, who was in later years to become the beloved Judge Hardy in the Andy Hardy series of films.

The film afternoon continued with early sound films and concluded with a number of trailers, or previews as some people call them. After these advance scenes from coming attractions had ended one member of the audience commented on the extravagant words and phrases used to plug the films. His contention was that no film lived up to the glowing terms in which they were described by either the printed word or beguiling commentator.

This led to a discussion of all advertising used to induce the public to buy, whether it be a ticket to the picture theatre, furniture or breakfast food. While the conversation was going on I began to think of the way the "Union Jack" advertised the next issue and decided to check through my collection when I got home. I did so and found the wording was every bit as enthusiastic as the movie trailers, phrased to induce the reader to buy the next week's exciting, thrilling or "grand" issue.

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Readers of the U.J. are aware that the next week's issue was advertised by showing a small reproduction of the cover accompanied by a brief outline of the story. Later this was replaced by a couple of paragraphs taken directly from an exciting part of the story. Following are a selection of some of those "verbal trailers" beginning with the story outline type.

U.J. 1281 (5 May, 1928) advertised the next issue "The Affair of the Staggering Man" thus: "The death of 5 out of the 6 witnesses for the Crown against the crooked Mr. Brewster was more than a coincidence, and when the 6th and last succumbed to a strange and terrible disease which robbed him completely of his memory and strength, Sexton Blake was asked to take a hand in things. He did, and as the result of a discovery, voluntarily walked right into the hands of the enemy. The results which followed will thrill you next week. Order your copy now."

U.J. 1290 (7 July, 1928) "The Legion of the Lost." "Our story next week takes Blake and Tinker into strange surroundings, into the toil and heat and heartbreak of the French Foreign Legion. A murder in London which Blake refuses to investigate and the case of a missing man conspire between them to make him a private soldier of the famous Legion. And here is the tale of what he accomplished there, of what he suffered, and how he with Tinker escaped back to civilisation . . . one of the outstanding Sexton Blake stories of the year. Ask your news-agent to reserve your copy of next week's U.J."

U.J. 1300 (15 September, 1928) "Who was the Man on the Stairs?" "Twenty years ago a murder was committed in Edinburgh. Mrs. Gilbertson was battered to death. Two people, the victim's servant girl and a man living in the flat below, saw the criminal on the stairs immediately after the crime had been committed. A man was afterwards arrested - Otto Slade - he was sentenced to death but reprieved and sent to penal servitude. In due time he was released, his sentence fully served. But he was innocent. He had been wrongly identified. Who then was the murderer? Sexton Blake, at the invitation of Splash Page and the 'Daily Radio' undertakes to investigate the 20 year old mystery. What were his discoveries will be told next week in a really brilliant yarn."

The further examples to follow will eliminate the prefacing remarks and give only the final few words which "sell" the story to the reader.

U. J. 1321 (9 February, 1929) "The Captive of the Craig" is about the finest thing of the kind you have ever come across."

U. J. 1328 (30 March, 1929) "The Flaming Trail." "Next week you are going to have a yarn to set your pulses racing."

U. J. 1347 (10 August, 1929) "The Adventure of the White Salute." "An action story, this. Rapid fire, movement without pause from Chapter 1. Thrills incessantly . . . interest never slackening. A yarn for excitement and grip such as is seldom published, even in the Union Jack. A yarn most assuredly worth booking NOW."

And finally from U. J. 1430 (14 March, 1931) "Thugs." "Here's something exciting. A smashing yarn. Better book your copy now."

From the foregoing it will be seen that each succeeding issue of the U. J. was well advertised, encouraging the reader to buy, in words and phrases no more flamboyant than those used in the movie trailers.



### VILLAINS,

by J. E. M.

### SECOND-HAND AND NEW

That Sexton Blake owes a debt to the figure of Sherlock Holmes seems a matter long beyond dispute (doubters should consult E. S. Turner's Boys Will be Boys or Francis Hertzberg's delightful essay in C. D. 296). But what about the numerous villains Blake encountered? How many of those are true originals? Let us look at just a handful of them.

One of the most spectacular of Blake's underworld enemies was Lewis Jackson's creation Leon Kestrel, the man of a thousand faces. Also dubbed "The Master Mummer," did he, one wonders, owe anything to the novel of that very name by E. Phillips Oppenheim? Another early foe of Blake's was Prince Wu Ling, who might be thought to have had a good deal in common with that sinister Oriental, Fu-Manchu. It seems a remarkable coincidence that the first Wu Ling story, The

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Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle (U.J. 507), appeared in the same year, 1913, as Sax Rohmer's first Fu-Manchu novel. Many of G. H. Teed's other characters also seem to me highly derivative. Adventuresses like Yvonne and Roxane might have stepped straight from the early novels of Oppenheim or Le Queux. It was surely not the originality of his characters but the authenticity of his settings, whether in China or the South Seas, Africa or the U.S.A., which made Teed's stories so vastly entertaining.

Even that imaginative and original writer Gwyn Evans, who certainly added new dimensions to the character of Blake himself, could be guilty of some fairly obvious "borrowing." Who or what inspired his creation of the disappearing Mr. Mist if it was not H. G. Wells' Invisible Man?

In his Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle had introduced a criminal network controlled by that "Napoleon of crime," Professor Moriarty. Did Robert Murray's Criminals' Confederation and its leaders owe anything to this conception? A description by Conan Doyle of Moriarty included the following: "... his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic looking ... his face ... is for ever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion." Except that Moriarty was also tall, his description might have been made for that later villainous Professor, Jason Reece, boss of the Criminals Confederation.

One undoubtedly original villain from the Blake saga was surely Zenith the Albino. I can think of no other character in popular fiction whom he even remotely resembles. His glittering charm, his chivalry and his melancholia might be found separately - perhaps even together - in other fictional creations, but these qualities were never so strikingly or so originally expressed as through the unique physical presence of Zenith. His strange, almost ghost-like appearance due to albinism, made him almost a creature from another world - a figure of authentic myth in fact.

The Criminals Confederation series, already referred to, also produced a striking original in Mr. John Smith, President of the C.C. This man, with his grey clothes and "grey" name, was surely a prototype



THE END OF THE WAY. The final chapter of our classic serial from over 60 years ago.

## THE ONLY WAY

Bob Cherry came into the junior common-room with a frown on his usually sunny face. There was a crowd in the common-room gathered round Billy Bunter. The fat junior was blinking through his big spectacles in a most important way. He had a letter in his hand, which he had been reading aloud. Bob Cherry caught Courtney's name, and he joined the group.

"What's that about Courtney?" he asked.

"He's the poacher," chuckled Skinner. "He's the chap who was robbing Sir Hilton Popper's preserves."

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"That's all you know!" said Snoop.

"Bunter's got it in a letter - a letter in Sir Hilton's own writing."

"Rats! What should Sir Hilton Popper write to Bunter for?"

"Oh, really, Cherry --"

"He's lying, of course," said Bob Cherry. "Besides, I happen to know that the poacher wasn't, and couldn't possibly have been, old Courtney."

"I think the letter makes it pretty clear," said Billy Bunter. "Sir Hilton says plainly that he knows it was Courtney, and he gives him the choice of going up to his house to take a flogging, or of being left to the police. It couldn't be plainer than that. He had to get there at six this evening and take the licking. Courtney went out just before six and he cycled in the direction of Sir Hilton's house. I think that makes it plain enough."

Bob Cherry gave a violent start.

It flashed upon his mind instantly; he knew now how it had happened that he and Wharton had found Courtney fainting by the roadside near Sir Hilton's house.

"That letter must be to Courtney, then," he exclaimed.

"So it is."

"Then how did you come by it? And how dare you read it?" demanded Bob Cherry, seizing the Paul Pry of Greyfriars by the

collar and shaking him savagely.

"Oh! Oh, really, Cherry --"

"Where did you get that letter?" roared Bob.

"Ow! I - I found it --"

"Where?"

"I - I happened to go into Courtney's study to see if there was anything in his cupboard - I mean, to borrow a Latin dictionary --"

There was a laugh.

"And I - I saw the letter on the desk. I didn't look at it - I hope I'm above looking at another fellow's letter - but I happened to see part of it, entirely by accident. Don't shake me like that, you beast! You might make my glasses fall off; and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them - ow!"

"So you stole the letter --"

"I - I considered it my duty to bring the letter away, and - and show him up," stammered Bunter. "You see, I thought that as he was a rotten poacher - Wow! Yah!"

"You fat cad!" said Bob savagely.

"Give me that letter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry --"

"Give me that letter!" thundered Bob.

"Here it is! You can have it, and welcome! Ow!"

"I'm going to take this letter back to Courtney, whom it belongs to," said Bob Cherry, with a wrathful glare at the juniors. "Bunter was a rotten cad to take it, and you're not much better to let him read it out to you --"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Snoop.

"Shut up, you cad, or I'll shut you up!" said Bob Cherry angrily. "This is a private letter, and you've no right to know what's in it. I'm going to take it back to Courtney. As for you Bunter --"

He gave the fat junior a twist that sent him whirling across the room. Billy Bunter sat down with a bump that seemed to shake the floor, and yelled.

"Ow!" groaned Bunter. "I'm dead - I

mean, I'm fearfully injured. Cherry, you beast --"

But Bob Cherry was gone. He strode along to the Sixth Form passage and knocked at Arthur Courtney's door.

"Come in!"

Bob Cherry entered. Courtney had dressed himself, and was looking something like his old self, though his face was still white. It would be many days before Courtney quite recovered from the terrible castigation he had received. Whenever he moved, a kind of spasm passed across his face, showing how the savage cuts upon his back still hurt him.

"What do you want, Cherry?" he asked.

Bob Cherry held out the letter, and Courtney uttered an exclamation as he saw it. He took it hastily.

"How did you get hold of this?" he demanded. "You haven't read it, surely." Bob Cherry flushed.

"No, I haven't, Courtney. But I know what's in it - a cad was reading it out and jawing it over in the common-room. And, look here, Courtney, that letter's made them think you were the rotter that poached on Sir Hilton's land."

"Never mind that --"

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly. "They're not going to think so, when I know the facts. You will have to let them know."

Courtney frowned.

"You haven't said anything so far, Cherry?"

"Not yet, but --"

"Then you must not. Let the matter rest. Do as I say, Cherry. If you know anything about the matter, you learned it by accident - through being where you had no right to be - and you have no right to say anything. You know that."

"But look here, you'll get the disgrace of being what Valence is really - and --"

There was a soft footfall in the passage, but Bob Cherry, in his excitement, did not hear it. Courtney interrupted him.

"It will soon be forgotten," he said.

"But it's not fair!" said Bob Cherry.

"Now, I know what's in that letter. I know what's happened to you to-day. Sir

Hilton Popper thought you were the poacher - that awful cad Valence must have made the keepers think so - and you went up to the house to-day and took the licking for that coward. You know you did - that's why we found you fainting in the road."

"My dear kid --"

"Why, you're as white as a sheet from it now," said Bob; "and that awful worm let you do it - let you take the licking in his place. Blessed if I've ever heard of such a rotter! He ought to be kicked out of the school! He ought to be sent to Coventry!"

"If you want to do me a favour, kid, you'll say nothing about the matter at all," said Courtney quietly. "You oughtn't to have known; and I rely upon you to keep your mouth shut."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll do as you wish, of course, but --"

Tap!

It was a knock at the half-open door. Bob Cherry swung round, and Courtney uttered a cry.

"V!!"

It was Valence's sister who stood at the door. Her face was as white as Courtney's; the prefect did not need telling that she had heard Bob Cherry's excited voice as she came up the passage.

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry, in dismay. "I've done it now!"

And he bolted from the study.

Violet stood in the doorway, her eyes fixed upon Courtney. The prefect ran towards her.

"V!!" he exclaimed. "Did you - did you --"

"I could not help hearing what the boy said as I came up the passage," said Violet. "I came to see my brother - to see if all was well with him."

"He's - he's gone out."

"Is it true, Arthur?"

"Is what true?"

"What that junior was saying."

Courtney hesitated.

"Well, you see --" he stammered.

"May I see that letter - Sir Hilton's letter?"

He passed it to her without a word.



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# NELSON LEE COLUMN

EZRA QUIRKE

by R. J. Godsave

One thing in which E. S. Brooks excelled was his ability to keep his readers in a state of mystification until the full explanation appeared in the final issue of the Nelson Lee series.

The Ezra Quirke series was, perhaps, the most outstanding of those dealing with occult phenomena in which strange and inexplicable manifestations occur.

The opening chapter of O.S. No. 542 "The Schoolboy Magician" arrests the attention of the reader with a dramatic description of Dame Nature in one of her destructive moods.

'The wind howled and moaned round St. Frank's with a steadily increasing force. Now and again it rose to a mighty shriek, and the solid old piles fairly shook under the force of the elements. It was a wild October night.'

In these few words Brooks set the stage for the introduction of a character who was to cause a wave of superstition to creep over the lower school.

The arrival at St. Frank's of Ezra Quirke after midnight on this wild night was as unusual as the boy himself. The following extract describes his appearance —

'He was attired in a curious cloak, and wore no hat. His long hair was waving weirdly in the wind, and his white face looked utterly ghostly.'

With this setting Brooks went ahead to give his readers a series of mystery. He described the seances which Quirke held and the effect on many members of the junior school. Even some of the more stable boys came under his spell and became his supporters. This is not surprising as Quirke claimed to be in association with the mysteries of Black Magic, and to all appearances he produced his illusions without the aid of any apparatus.

Anyone who has attended a seance or indulged in amateur spiritualism can appreciate the effect on the St. Frank's boys. I once attended a gathering of friends who attempted the lifting of the table.

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I am absolutely positive there was no trickery by any of the gathering, and although I was a somewhat negative force and tried to prevent it rising I was unsuccessful.

Strange things happen in this world which cannot be ignored. This is not to say that Brooks was preaching spiritualism, as indeed he was doing the opposite. He exposed Quirke as a trickster and fraud aided by confederates.

Brooks was always good at writing a story within a story. The whole elaborate set-up by Quirke was only to condition the Hon. Douglas Singleton into a state whereby he would give a large sum of money to a confederate who posed as Professor Tucker who claimed to have invented a machine which healed withered limbs and flesh wounds immediately.

\* \* \*

RICHARD BASIL HERBERT BENNET

by William Lister

But for St. Frank's, one would never have heard of Edward Oswald Handforth, or Ezra Quirke, or many of the other exciting and unusual characters created by Edwy Searles Brooks. The school stories of St. Frank's were the birth-place of many outstanding figures. They were the products of the old school. They were created to people it, to provide it with life, love, and laughter as well as sorrow, hate and tears. It is the characters of St. Frank's that pull on the strings of our heart; whether they be robust, blunt, honest and open-hearted, such as Handforth, or thin, weedy and dishonest like Ezra Quirke.

But it must be admitted that some of the characters had an existence outside St. Frank's - a sort of pre-existence; even here their lives were prolonged, their characters developed, their adventures multiplied, because of their connection with St. Frank's.

Nelson Lee and Nipper wer two such people. When first we meet Nipper he is not a schoolboy. He is as-it-were, injected (along with Nelson Lee) into the school. In fact they were using St. Frank's as an escape hatch from a Chinese Tong, with no intention of spending the rest of their lives there.

"NIPPER ARRIVES AT ST. FRANK'S" by EDWY SEARLES

BROOKS, provides a wealth of information on those early days.

The "Nipper" I knew in the latter stories, was certainly more polished than the one I find in the opening chapter of this story, "NIPPER THE NEW BOY" related by Nipper himself.

As I quote, note the style of writing and the use of slang words, which, while indeed may be used by the St. Frank's fellows, would certainly not pass in an essay for the schoolmaster. The following quotes are now from "Nipper's" pen.

"I feel bound to shove it down." Shove? Hardly a choice word to express "write down." Or "the gov'nor had gone to New York after a forger-johnny, named Ferroll." Forger-johnny? A nice phrase for some council school kid like myself, but would it get by a St. Frank's master?

Again "some rotten gun-men got hold of him and chucked him down the shaft of a deserted mine."

"Rotten" and "chucked" - come, come, hardly the right patter for the old school's image. We are also told that the Fu-Chang "blighters" forced Nelson Lee to stay in Snake City. "Blighters?" Now do not think I am picking, but I don't think the St. Frank's boys would use these words in writing, even if they did express them vocally.

Which only goes to show that when we read of "Nipper" in later copies of the "Nelson Lee Library" we begin to realise how much of the old school's polish had rubbed off on to him.

And so Nipper arrives at St. Frank's, or should I say Richard Basil Herbert Bennet, the boy with a good-natured face and curly hair, which was unruly under his cap? It is as Bennet that Nipper gets his first glance at St. Frank's. It was evening and the sun was shining from a clear blue sky.

Come with me while I join Richard Basil Herbert Bennet on a journey he was to take many times in the years to follow.

One mile to St. Frank's! As we pass through, first over the bridge, spanning the River Stowe and then nestling in a hollow, the village of Bellton.

The station porter had informed us of a short cut by the tow-path. The roads being dusty because of the long dry spell, and Nipper not wanting to arrive at St. Frank's looking like a miller, we took it.

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The sun was shining on the river gloriously, and we saw a smart little boat shoot under the bridge, and glide along smoothly. The boat was occupied by three boys.

In a little while we caught our first glimpse of St. Frank's, but let Nipper give his own impression.

"Through the trees I caught my first glimpse of St. Frank's. It was a splendid place. There were two main houses, the College House and the Ancient House. They formed a kind of letter A, the northern ends of both houses being much wider apart than the southern. The wide open space in front - in most schools called a quadrangle - was known at St. Frank's as the Triangle. Both houses were ivy covered, and they looked delightful in the evening sunlight."

Well that's how our Richard Basil Herbert Bennet saw St. Frank's for the first time. (Now I can put you on to something good.) If you want to see St. Frank's as you always imagined it, beg, borrow or buy Bob Blythe's "Nelson Lee Guide and Bibliography," turn to the back pages and here you get more than your money's worth. Several plates with various views of the old school. One - St. Frank's from River Stowe, has captured the scene Nipper saw that sunny evening so long ago.

Between ourselves, if I was a bachelor, I would like to have these plates framed and hung up in my bachelor den, but as things are, my little wife wouldn't stand for it. She wouldn't have a portrait of me hung on the wall, let alone my favourite school.

However, back to my subject. I have digressed. I got carried away with my first sight of St. Frank's.

Nipper as Richard Basil Herbert Bennet was soon swept up into the life of St. Frank's. Ahead of him untold adventures.

Well, there it is! Richard Basil Herbert Bennet or Nipper got his first sight of St. Frank's. And so they came together these two, the subject and the object, Nipper and St. Frank's; and so they stayed together till the curtain went down for the last time with the demise of the Nelson Lee Library.

The good old "Nelson Lee." Will we ever see its like again?

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 94 — Boys' Friend 3d Library No. 237 — "King Cricket"

There can be little doubt that Charles Hamilton's descriptions of cricket matches far excelled any accounts of games on the football field. One has only to think of some of the really great Magnet series like those revolving around Lancaster or Stacey to realise how well he could evoke the atmosphere of the summer game. Of course, he never attempted a ball-by-ball description of the whole match, but the incidents that he did describe were vital to the dramatic development of the story. Who will ever forget how Stacey deliberately ran out Wharton, or how he fell to pieces as a cricketer on receiving bad news?

The famous "King Cricket" story is a vivid testimony to Charles Hamilton's early love of the game. Teeming with famous Hamiltonian names, it was obviously reprinted from a serial written before the Magnet was published, soon after the turn of the century. Perhaps a cricket historian could identify the names of the players of the real county clubs mentioned in the story, and so work out its original date from this information.

The hero of the story is Arthur Lovell, an amateur cricketer for Loamshire, who is in love with the daughter of Colonel Hilton, the mainstay of the county club. Financial misfortune strikes, and he has to become a professional, a player instead of a gentleman. Enemies like Lagden and snobs like Ponsonby and Tunstall despise him, but the friendship of Valance, another paid player, enables him to maintain his morale. It is an interesting sidelight of social history to read how the gentlemen treated the players on and off the field, even though some of the amateurs contrived to make more out of the game than the professionals did.

Re-reading this story after about a quarter of a century, I was struck once again by the direct but appealing style in which it is written. It contains few of the quotations and allusions that were later to become such a feature of Hamiltoniana, but its adult flavour and lack of juvenile characters make it a most unusual story for this author, with a delightful Edwardian atmosphere. It is astonishing to see how a convincing plot is based upon what is really a series of cricket matches, with

character drama predominating over everything else. It would be idle to pretend that "King Cricket" is one of the great Hamiltonian epics, but it is nevertheless a most interesting example of a different style of story. It is fascinating to wonder how many other of Charles Hamilton's unreprinted serials of this period lie waiting to be discovered.

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## REVIEW

"D'ARCY, THE RUNAWAY"

Martin Clifford  
(Howard Baker Press, £2.75)

This volume will be warmly welcomed as the first reprint of the much-loved Gem Library. For many it will make a pleasant change from the ubiquitous Bunter.

The Runaway series comprises 6 stories from the Indian Summer of the Gem, nearly 50 years ago. Though the theme has been used in other series, this one, starring the inimitable Gussy, is memorable for its wit and charm. Gussy, "wetiwing" from St. Jim's, takes shelter in turn at Greyfriars, Highcliffe, Cliff House, and Rookwood, before justice catches up with him more or less. One of the Gem's most delightful series.

The opening story in the volume is "Top of the River" which has nothing to do with the Runaway series, and is by a substitute writer. Maybe there will be mixed feelings as to whether or not it should have been included in the volume, but, at least, it makes another facsimile copy to add to a collection.

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S A L E: Nelson Lee's, 6 copies 1923, 23 copies 1925. £5.60 the lot.

LITVAK, 58 STANWELL ROAD, ASHFORD, MIDDX.

XX

OWING TO PRESSURE ON SPACE we have no room this month for the next article on the old cinemas and theatres. All being well, it will appear next month.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 164. REMEMBER, REMEMBER ---

"You see, in a real government they invent jobs for chaps, their friends and relations. The Opposition tries to show them up to the public, for the sake of getting them out of office, so they can get in instead, and invent jobs for their own friends and relations," said Lowther, with a wisdom beyond his years. "Then sometimes it becomes convenient to have a coalition of both parties, and they agree to whack out the jobs and salaries; and, without an Opposition to cause trouble, they can invent any number of jobs, and plunder the country to any extent, and the police can't touch them, because it's all legal, you know. And this goes on until there's a crowd of new men come along, hungry for salaries, and they form a new Opposition."

The above is an extract from what was probably the most original November the Fifth story that Charles Hamilton ever wrote, "Grundy's Gunpowder Plot," which Danny, in his diary this month, reminds us appeared in the Gem exactly 50 years ago. The story was reprinted in one of the later Holiday Annuals.

The original St. Jim's Parliament was created by Hamilton in one or two blue Gems in 1908. Reading them today, an adult finds them mildly amusing with their cynical comments on the Westminster parliament and politicians. Skimpole, the early Socialist, was a good foil for satire, but the author spread his wit over anything parliamentary. The tales were dull, and one would think that youthful readers found them wordy, slow, and stodgy.

Pentelow introduced his St. Jim's parliament in 1917, and created Mr. Pepper who owned a barn where the St. Jim's parliament was to operate. It is impossible to say whether Pentelow knew of the 1908 version, or whether Hamilton recalled his early essays on the theme. Pentelow, lacking the wit and satirical bite of Hamilton, made his parliament tales almost unreadable. But Hamilton himself also took up the theme again, with the Pentelow basis, and introducing Mr. Pepper and his barn. The fact that Hamilton wrote "Grundy's Gunpowder Plot," based on Pentelowisms, in late 1921, long after Pentelow had given up the editorship of the papers, rather makes

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nonsense of the later belief that Hamilton felt any very intense resentment against Pentelow at that time.

Possibly it is going much too far to wonder whether Hamilton's dislike of politicians was responsible for the many sparkling tales he wrote about Guy Fawkes' Day, though it is possible that he thought Mr. Fawkes the only man who entered parliament with good intentions.

An early Hamilton story of November the Fifth occurred in that red-Magnet series in which the Bounder brought about the expulsion of the whole of the Famous Five, passing along to the most sombre of all Christmas Double Numbers which contained "Drummed Out of Greyfriars," and culminated in that old classic "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out."

There was an unavoidable sameness about all the November the Fifth stories, but they all had enormous charm which can be savoured again and again. Guy Fawkes Day was, apart from Christmas, the anniversary which featured in the stories more than any other. Plenty of these little jewels, of fireworks and guys and bonfires, appeared as parts of series, as did the one I mentioned earlier. It was something of an achievement, the way Hamilton produced his Guy Fawkes' story, written months in advance, to fit in the correct slot in a series in the first week of November. We found Guy Fawkes recalled in the Toad series, the Rebel series, the Skip series, the Strong Alonzo series, and, perhaps, most effective of all, in the Prout - Headmaster series. And, of course, there were many others - in singles and in series.

I wonder what Hamilton would have thought of parliaments in connection with our grotesque decimal currency as November the Fifth approaches. Perhaps he would have made Monty Lowther say that he didn't see the point.

### CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

LEN WORMULL: "The Gift" sums up beautifully the power and magic of Hamilton's writing in this one sentence: "There was a warmth in his writing which, right from the beginning, took him out of the hack class and placed him on a different plane from his contemporaries in the same field." Herbert Leckenby, reviewing his Autobiography, quoted the immediate acceptance of his first story at seventeen, adding: "George Bernard Shaw and many another famous man of letters couldn't boast of

that." Certainly, it seems Hamilton was untrammelled by early struggles, and only a "special gift" indeed could have so captured the hearts of generations of readers. It has been said that readers and publishers alike could hardly wait for the ink to dry, and I was one who connived to get my copy of the Companion papers a day beforehand.

After the war, when I thought Hamiltonia was behind me, I wrote a thank you letter to the author, wishing him a happy retirement in my ignorance. Back came a charming letter listing his latest writings, and ending thus: "Retire? I never was a very retiring sort of chap. Two things keep me working - first I don't want to retire, and, second, I couldn't live on air if I did. I hope, God willing, to run on for 20 years yet." Like an actor, he lived the parts of his wonderful creations to the very end.

GEOFFREY WILDE: Yes, by all means let's be controversial. Despite its colloquial use to describe anyone who 'lays down the law,' I can't really accept your interpretation of the word "dogmatic." Unless you are quite irrational on the topic, you are not dogmatic in claiming that the Old Bus is better than the Water Lily series - you are simply stating a personal conviction. But when you make the extreme assertion "All critics are dogmatic," then indeed you lapse into dogma. A dogma is a belief so blindly maintained that it becomes an axiom whereby all individual cases can be pronounced upon without further resort to an act of judgment. It is characteristic of dogmatic pronouncements that they are either generalisations, or specific verdicts based upon a generalisation. So while it is not dogmatic, for instance, to believe that Hamilton was a finer writer than Brooks, it is dogmatic to maintain that any given story by Brooks must therefore automatically be inferior to any given story by Hamilton.

Now unless I mistake my friend Mr. Truscott, this was precisely his point: that Roger Jenkins has tended in his critical writings to dismiss Charles Hamilton's post-war work simply because it was post-war. And Peter Hanger's letter would seem to indicate that, right or wrong, Mr. Truscott is not alone in his opinion.

The question is too complex to resolve here, but I have a suggestion which may, I hope, prove constructive. "In my humble opinion..." may sound modest, but it can soon become a pretty meaningless formula.

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I quite agree that the continual use of such phrases by our critics would be both tiresome and unnecessary. But what they could usefully do, I suggest, when making unsupported assertions, is to add some brief indication of the places where they have argued the matter out more fully, so that interested parties could follow up the reference. This should combine the diplomatic touch with the important practical benefit of steering subsequent discussion in the proper direction. I know, of course, that some objectors will have read the critic's original articles; that others may find access to them difficult; and that others, once referred to them, will remain unconvinced. But at least we should end up arguing about the right things. Our concern should always be with the merits of the other chap's case, not with the irritating fact that he happens to have his own opinions. Controversy may be healthy, but it is still best undertaken for the purpose of resolving issues, not just for the exercise.

One of our problems undoubtedly is that in a fellowship like ours everyone has his pet convictions, but comparatively few feel confident in putting pen to paper. Certain viewpoints have therefore (through no fault of your own, Sir) commanded a disproportionate share of space in your pages, and this has helped to blur the distinction between Fact and Opinion in the minds of many readers.

The other problem is that our very welcome growth has created something of a generation gap. The most cherished opinions of our senior scholars (a term I prefer to 'experts') were forged long ago in the fires of debate, and their views are doubtless well documented in your back numbers. The classic issues must have been thrashed out in discussion, correspondence, and articles in the early days of the Clubs. So, as many readers know not only where Mr. Jenkins stands, but why, he presumably sees no need to make out a case every time he expresses an opinion. And the same applies to other critics. Obviously there is neither time nor space for endless recapitulation. But in a happily expanding brotherhood we have keen and well-informed students with us now who took no part in those historic debates of yesteryear, and to these - the other half, as it were, - Mr. Jenkins must appear simply to advance views without reasons.

Perhaps, indeed, it comes to this: that the time has now come

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to re-open some of the Great Debates, and invite various specialists to re-state their position now that the S.P.C.D. approaches its Silver Jubilee. I wonder what other readers think? For one thing is sure: the periodic re-examination of our pet beliefs, and the foundations whereon they rest, is a healthy undertaking for any of us, and one of the most valuable safeguards against dogmatism.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT: You say that both in my letter and my article I accused Roger Jenkins of being dogmatic. It is true that I wrote the phrase "such dogmatic statements" in my letter, and I apologise - I was doing what I dislike a lot in others: using a word to mean what it does not mean. "Biassed" is what I should have written. In the article I did not use the word "dogmatic" at all. You may think I meant it, but in fact I did not. I did mean "biassed," although I did not use this word, either. There is, for me, at any rate, a definite distinction between "dogma," which refers to revealed truth, that which we could not know of our own reason, or unless it had been revealed to us, and the statement of personal preferences and dislikes as facts, with no reasons given to back them up. Nor do I think it a waste of words to indicate that what is being given is one's opinion, not a once for all verdict; there is always time and space for good manners. The kind of think I dislike in Mr. Jenkins smacks of arrogance; almost, too, an air of "because I have been studying and writing of the MAGNET for so long, I have a special right of proprietorship over the assessment of this magazine." I would remind Mr. Jenkins that plenty of people who have not necessarily been a member of the O.B.B.C. as long as he has have quite as much knowledge of this paper as he, a point I feel is sometimes overlooked. An instance is Roger Jenkins' complete sweeping away of the post-war Bunter books; far more arrogant in the tone it conveys from the written word is Bill Lofts' still more dogmatic, or should I say, dictatorial, approval of Mr. Jenkins in this matter, expressed almost with an air of contempt for those who are so misguided as to view these books with any sort of approval. I will admit that I do not find a lot of this in Mr. Jenkins; it is simply that when he does do it, his way of doing it carries with it the qualities I have enumerated. I find far more of this kind of arrogance in Mr. Lofts.

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Eric Fayne adds: Surely our friends are being a trifle pedantic over my use of the word "dogmatic." I make no claim to write very good English, but my dictionary gives the meaning of "dogmatic" as "stating opinions arrogantly and without proof." It seems to me that that was just what Mr. Truscott's arguments were all about.

It seems futile that Hamiltonians should fight among themselves. There is no more staunch Hamiltonian than Mr. Jenkins. He thinks that some parts of Hamiltonia are better than others. It also seems a pity to let any argument get down to the level of an "I know as much as you do" fracas.

I have a bulging mail-bag, but I find no evidence of much of a gap between long-time enthusiasts and newer hobbyists. I don't know where Mr. Wilde has seen it. We seem to be constantly re-hashing old themes. So far as Great Debates go, the place for them is club meetings. By all means send us the results of the debates, and we shall be happy to publish them.

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## *NEWS OF THE CLUBS*

### MIDLANDS

Meeting held on 28th September, 1971.

We were honoured to welcome, amongst the nine present, none other than our illustrious and much respected President, Jack Corbett himself, accompanied by Mrs. Corbett - and a very happy gathering we were too!

At these informal meetings we do not observe a set programme, but let conversation run the full Collectors' gamut as it will (under, shall I call it "steerage," by the Chairman, who always pulls something out of the bag, ably abetted by Tom Porter as occasion merits). Bill Morgan reminisced aloud recalling the old stamp dealers' advertisements from "The Captain" circa 1913. He related personal recollections of the grand offers prevalent in those far-off days and confessed that he still collects stamps today, as, we were heartened to hear, do many of the youngsters of today.

Tom Porter presented the Anniversary Number, Nelson Lee Library (Old Series) No. 173 "Expelled from St. Frank's" dated 28

September 1918 - 53 years old to the day - and the Collectors' Item was B. F. L. (Second Series) No. 649 "The Barring Out at Bendover," a reprint of weekly stories in "The Pilot" featuring the well-loved Will Hay whose ever askew pince-nez and mortar board so excellently characterised his schoolmaster portrayal rather larger than life!

After coffee break and the raffle draw, it was Chairman, Ivan Webster's pleasant duty to acknowledge our President's generous gift to the Club of two hardback volumes "Billy Bunter's Barring Out" and "Billy Bunter's Brainwave."

The evening ended with two one-minute talks on famous schools of Old Boys Book lore: Greyfriars, on which Jack Corbett eloquently discoursed for the full time without apparent effort, and Treasurer Norman Gregory held forth on the Rookwood School at which he would clearly have preferred to have been a pupil!

Our next meeting will be at the Birmingham Theatre Centre, from 7.30 p.m. onwards, on Tuesday, 26th October, when we look forward to another enjoyable gathering of old friends.

IAN BENNETT  
Vice-Chairman.

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### NORTHERN

The Club assembled on Saturday, 9th October, 1971, and the meeting was better attended with 15 members and friends. It was pleasant to re-welcome Elsie Taylor after a long absence. Chairman Geoffrey Wild was once again on duty although regrettably Ron Hodgson could not be with us. After we had dealt with the business side of the meeting, the remainder of the evening was split firstly in completing a crossword compiled by Mary Cadogan - a member of Northern & London Section with prizes awarded by one of our own members Bessie Barron. The first to finish was Ron Rhodes with runners up Bill Williamson and Geoffrey Wild.

After a pleasant break for refreshments we entered the second stage with readings from the school story mentioned last month. The reader, Geoffrey Goode, satisfied us all with his efforts and impersonations, and this went down really well. (We all hoped Geoffrey would

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have voice left enough for the following day's sermon.) Discussions followed with constructive criticism being made. This criticism finally converted itself to praise which rounded off a very pleasant evening.

We finally adjourned at 9.20.

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### LONDON

A new rendezvous for the autumn October meeting at the home of Alex and Mary Cadogan, in ideal surroundings at Beckenham. An excellent attendance, and it was a happy meeting. Only one disappointment was the fact that Charlie Wright was unable to attend. The best wishes of all present were accorded to Charlie for a speedy recovery. Congratulations to P.G. Wodehouse on the occasion of his recent 90th birthday anniversary, a hearty welcome to new member, Maurice Corkett and also 'gratters' to Marjorie Norris, whose birthday anniversary is in a couple of days' time. All these proceedings conducted by Chairman Brian Doyle.

The December 5th luncheon party at the Rembrandt Hotel was discussed and all members desiring to be present must kindly inform the undersigned, cost round about £3 inclusive.

Bob Blythe read extracts from Newsletter No. 17, 1953 vintage, Ray Hopkins gave a fine talk on "The Rover," Brian Doyle was the winner of Bob Blythe's Tape Quiz, Winifred Morss read a couple of chapters from a Nelson Lee Library dated April, 1931, and Brian Doyle played a very laughable tape of the late Will Hay. Another tape by Doyle was the one when he interviewed C. H. Chapman, on the occasion of the latter's 90th birthday. Don Webster proposed the vote of thanks to Alex, Mary and Teresa Cadogan for such excellent hospitality.

Next meeting at 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22, on Sunday, 21st November. Kindly inform the hostess, Josie Packman if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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## *The Postman Called*

(Interesting items from the  
Editor's letter-bag)

BILL LOFTS (London): There is no doubt in my mind, that the series on old music-halls and theatres seems to be one of the most popular ever to appear in C.D. In meeting

collectors in all parts of the British Isles, they all talk enthusiastically about their own local halls. It could be argued that this is not strictly within the realms of Old Boys fiction, but there is a very strong link in the world of pure nostalgia. My own 'local' was the Metropolitan Music Hall, Edgware Road, pulled down to make way for the fly-over. I attended the very last performance - sitting between David Frost, Janette Scott, Thora Hird and Jimmy Scott. I am hoping that this theatre can be included in a later article.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: I am embarrassed that the Met has been omitted in our series. It was, of course, one of the Syndicate Halls, and a delightful one. It was London music-hall at its very best. Incidentally, it played a star part in the famous British film "The Blue Lamp.")

CHRIS LOWDER (Hampstead): Nothing New Under The Sun Dept.: It might come as something of a surprise to your readers to learn, as I did recently, that the phrase "Sock it to me!" was not coined by 34 writers for the American "Laugh-In" show. Fact is Hamilton was using it way back in 1907. Slightly altered, true - but the root is there, without a doubt. In "Tom Merry & Co." (B.F.L. 1st Series, No. 30 - an original St. Jim's novel by 'Martin Clifford') the phrase "Sock it to them!" occurs something like half-a-dozen times. As far as I know, Hamilton never used it in the 1920's or thereafter. He probably discarded it, along with a lot of other phrases, because it sounded old-fashioned. If only he'd known ...

Miss M. HARLOW (New Milton): May I say how much I look forward to early each month and to the pleasure I get from each copy? In particular I like your own column and agree so much with what you have to say about this and that.

Regarding your "first lines" mentioned this month, I too, remember "Tom Merry's Concert Party" very vividly. I must have been about ten years old when I read it, but even 55 years afterwards I recall some of the verses in that story i.e. "Between me and you I will add, the name on his collar is Gussy."

I still read Hamilton, and if I am particularly depressed, it is the best tonic I can have. Most of all thank you for the tireless work you do to produce such an interesting and delightful magazine.

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): Recently I contacted Mr. Henry Cecil Bullivant, who used to be editor of the Boys' Realm, etc., as well as writing many adventure yarns for the Boys' Friend and other periodicals. I was delighted to receive a long letter from him, and he sent me 2 Boys' Friend Libs. which he had written under his pen-name of Maurice Everard - "The League of Seven" B.F.L. No. 397, and "South Sea Treasure," B.F.L. No. 707. Also Girls' Friend Lib. No. 230 "Turned Twenty-One," written as Alice Millard, and "In the Wake of Columbus," written as Francis Everard. Mr. Bullivant is 88 and almost blind.

JIM SWAN (Paddington): He was football's biggest goalkeeper - over 6 ft. and weighing 21 stone. He played for Chelsea and England at the turn of the century, and, because of his width, became famous for saving penalties. He left Chelsea at the end of 1905 to sign for Bradford. Finally he left league football and toured fairgrounds. He invited the public to stake money against "the famous footballer, Fatty Foulke, of England and Chelsea fame." Business was brisk, and the one-man show was transferred to Blackpool sands.

Is there any connection between this real-life character and the one who was a great favourite in the Boys' Realm, as the goalkeeper in the Blue Crusaders stories?

(It seems probable. Was the Blue Crusaders 'keeper named Fatty Fowkes? - ED.)

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